

Thank you Chairman Serrano and Ranking Member Aderholt for convening this hearing, for listening to members, and for all of the work you and your staff are dedicating to funding so many critical programs.

It wasn't all that long ago that I found myself standing next to clients as a legal aid volunteer in Boston's housing courts, helping people desperate to keep a roof over their family's heads navigate a complex web of laws and codes that I too struggled to comprehend.

Through their eyes, I saw our systems failing. A justice system that wasn't providing anything close to equal justice. A housing system that promised tenants and homeowners certain rights, but only if they had the resources to pursue those remedies. And an economic system tilted towards the already powerful, the already wealthy, the already privileged.

Back then, I was trying to help those clients. But I was also trying to survive law school and prepare to pass the Bar.

So in that moment, I didn't even fully grasp just how deep this crisis had seeped into our society.

Now I do.

And I've learned that underfunding legal aid creates an unrepentant undercurrent that overcomes working Americans when crisis strikes.

From housing to health care to domestic violence to sexual assault to employment to recovering from a natural disaster, lack of legal representation can trigger a cascade of consequences that leaves our neighbors vulnerable to bankruptcy, unemployment, homelessness, incarceration, and even the loss of life.

Nationwide, 90% of landlords in eviction lawsuits have legal representation. But only 10% of their tenants do.

86% of low-income people involved in civil legal proceedings receive insufficient or no help at all.

Nearly three-quarters of low-income households encountered at least one civil legal problem in the last year.

Low-income Americans will ask for help from local legal aid organizations nearly 2 million times in a given year and because of lack of funding, they will only receive limited or no help more than half the time.

But when we make good on our promise of equal justice, the results are undeniable.

Every year, organizations receiving funding from the Legal Services Corporation support nearly 100,000 veterans and their families.

In 2019, LSC released an extensive report showing how critical legal aid is in our efforts to combat the opioid epidemic.

Studies in Manhattan have shown that legal counsel for tenants led to a 77% decrease in warrants issued for evictions.

In rural areas. In urban cities. In the wake of natural disasters. In domestic violence proceedings. In veterans' affairs. In health care disputes. In housing courts.

Every single day, underpaid lawyers and volunteers working for underfunded organizations are desperately trying to make good on this nation's promise of equal justice because we have failed to do so.

We're here today to ask that Congress provides robust funding for LSC because we can't afford not to.

But we should also make clear that our work isn't finished with one appropriations bill. We have a long ways to go and I look forward to working with everyone in this room to help us get there.